

Encarnacion, Omar G. *Framing Equality: The Politics of Gay Marriage Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. 216 pages. Hardcover, \$30.20.

Since the Netherlands legalized same-sex marriage in 2001, more than three dozen other nations have likewise done so. While much is known about the American effort, less is known from a comparative perspective about how each nation succeeded in the extended fight for equality. *Framing Equality: the Politics of Gay Marriage Wars* by Omar Encarnacion adds to a growing body of literature in this field by focusing on how the same-sex marriage movement was framed in three democratic nations, including the United States, Brazil, and Spain. The study is especially timely given recent events.

Author Omar C. Encarnacion earned his Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University in politics and is currently Charles Flint Kellogg Professor of Politics at Bard College. He is no stranger to cross-national research: his previous books on the same topic have traced Latin America's gay rights revolution and advocated for gay reparations.

The structure of the text includes an introduction and five chapters. In the introduction, Encarnacion defines and discusses the attributes of framing, or how social movement messages direct the attention of the public. He notes that among framing's benefits are that it can "identify a new problem, propose remedies to that problem, and rally the public in support of these remedies" (p.6) but on the negative side framing can also impact the method and degree of backlash from opponents. Encarnacion asserts that there have been three types of framing approaches involving gay marriage movements across countries: legal, moral, and political. The three democratic nations selected for case study each demonstrated one of the aforementioned approaches.

In chapter 1, several critical factors in the politics of gay marriage conflicts are covered. For instance, several reasons for changes in marriage equality success worldwide are advanced.

Among these are the influence of activists, effective slogans, and societal and cultural shifts in attitudes and perceptions. Another explanation for gay marriage's ascension in the current century is weakening power of the Catholic Church in many nations. Finally, the type of framing approach adopted in gay marriage fights is conditioned by both domestic variables and the nature of opposition framing.

Chapter 2 reviews the gay marriage movement in Spain, which culminated in that nation becoming just the third to legalize the practice. According to Encarnacion, Spanish supporters of gay marriage employed a moral-type framing strategy, which demanded dignity and respect as much as full marriage rights. By using a catchy slogan and aligning with parties and politicians who supported the movement, Spanish backers of gay marriage were able to mute the opposition. Too, the nation's reckoning with its past—particularly how gays were regarded and treated during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco—helped to facilitate understanding and forgiveness necessary for gay marriage's victory.

Chapter 3 deals with the case of the United States, which according to Encarnacion “endured the longest and most toxic gay marriage war in the West despite being the cradle of the contemporary gay rights movement” (p13). Several factors slowed the American effort for marriage equality. For instance, there was an early schism within the gay community on same-sex marriage. Further, opponents to gay rights utilized direct democracy measures to thwart gains, lobbying for the Defense of Marriage Act at the federal level and initiating dozens of ballot measures at the state and local level. However, for Encarnacion, the biggest flaw by supporters was to adopt a legal framing strategy in which they advocated for same-sex marriage as a basic civil right protected by the U.S. Constitution. Once that orientation was revised to include moral framing and more humanization, the movement experienced more success.

Brazil's effort to legalize same sex marriage is depicted in Chapter 4. As opposed to either Spain or the United States, Brazil proponents of gay marriage employed a political framing strategy, mixing elements of both legal and moral framing. Supporters benefitted from political alliances in the government, from international assistance, from a previous law on the books penalizing homophobia, and from an ever-more-tolerant Catholic Church. Encarnacion notes that Brazilian backers of same-sex marriage borrowed Spain's moral-based slogan and avoided the level of backlash seen in America.

In the final chapter, Encarnacion describes the gay marriage fight in two additional countries, Argentina and Ireland. Legalizing same-sex marriage in 2010, Argentina advocates utilized a political framing strategy. Ireland, which legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, won with a moral framing strategy, according to the author. Important variables in the fight for same-sex marriage rights are then summarized. Finally, several conclusions are offered. For one, evidence from the study points to the value of comparative analysis in this area. Second, Encarnacion asserts that efficiency in the use of resources is more important than the pure amount. Third, all successful instances of legalized same-sex marriage involve transforming public attitudes and culture, and the best way to ensure victory is to adopt moral-based framing.

The literature on same-sex marriage is extensive when assessing the United States alone, while less plentiful from a comparative perspective. R. Claire Snyder's 2006 book evaluates gay marriage within a democratic setting. Following the 2015 Supreme Court ruling in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, studies by Darel Paul (2019), Willam Eskridge and Christopher Riano (2020), and Michael Rosenfeld (2021) highlight the long path toward legalization in the United States. From a cross-national viewpoint, Jordi Diez (2015) examines gay marriage issues in Mexico and South America; Bronwyn Winter et al. (2017) relay same-sex marriage concerns

from a global angle; Jackie Jones contrasts marriage equality features in the European Union, Canada, and America (2017); and Kaushal Pal Singh (2023) probes historical, current, and future legal frameworks of same-sex marriage across several regions.

Framing Equality: The Politics of Gay Marriage Wars is an excellent addition to the aforementioned genre. Encarnacion relies on archival documents from several libraries in the United States and Spain together with direct interviews with gay marriage activists in all three nations for which detailed case studies are presented. While the application of each framing strategy seems consistent with the manner by which gay marriage transpired in the nations selected, the independent impact of the media's framing could have been examined further. Future comparative studies on the subject should include those democratic nations in Africa and Asia. And they should pay heed to Encarnacion's advice that how same-sex marriage victories are won is just as critical as winning itself, both to minimize blowback and to retain positive momentum.

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